
This collection of papers edited and introduced by S. Diamond originated in 1968 as a Wenner-Gren symposium organized by S. Diamond and D. Hymes. While the idea of a symposium on different national traditions of anthropology was as noble as it was necessary, the resulting volume falls short of expectations. Because its shortcomings are of particular importance I shall treat the volume as a whole, rather than dwell on papers individually, even though many would merit lengthy treatment and are certainly worth reading.

Firstly, the book does not address the matter of what an anthropological tradition is. The very title of the book would imply that an anthropological tradition is a genealogy, a kinship system, a succession of ancestors and heirs. Yet Diamond in his Introduction and several of the contributors (e.g., Scholte) imply that it is a positive science, riding along on historical forces which, in some mysterious fashion, have a predilection for positivist principles. Professor Diamond’s Introduction does not clarify the implicit claim that the morality of anthropologists qua human beings edifies anthropology qua discipline. In fact, a certain confusion about the nature of an anthropological tradition (is it a collection of ancestral portraits or the accumulation of facts and the elaboration of theories or the expression of historical forces?) informs many of the papers. Collecting ancestors, dusting their portraits and hanging them together in one gallery is not sufficient to enable either author or editor to claim that visitors can take one walk round and exit knowing what that particular cultural tradition of anthropology is all about.

Furthermore, Diamond’s attempts to construct supra-national genealogies tends to obscure the woods for the trees. The reader wonders what sort of relationship Diamond is proposing between individuals, the cultural traditions to which they belong and the universalist, positivist claims of a science which spends its time rising. Here he takes views quite consonant with Marvin Harris (The Rise of Anthropological Theory. A History of Theories of Culture, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), an advocate of what might be called the yeast theory of the history of anthropology.

Quite naturally, therefore, the reader has a right to be suspicious when he encounters claims for the relative truth and durability of present criticism. It is as though the editor and certain contributors had conveniently stepped outside history; unlike their ancestors, they—so the argument goes—know where historical forces are bearing us. “Our generalizations are at once conscious and critical of themselves and are to be destroyed for a better” (p. 31), writes Lawrence Krader. Or again, “the potency of anthropology in any cultural tradition is criticism” (p. 32). However, what Krader or Diamond mean by “criticism” and how it relates either to the specific national/cultural context of anthropology’s ancestors or to universal forces guiding the history of the discipline remain obscure. Implicitly, Krader, Diamond, Scholte and others seem to be
saying that “criticism” as a particular force which anthropology contributes to the workings of universal historical principles may be outside historical/cultural contexts to the extent to which anthropologists are conscious of them (i.e., confirmed Hegelians), a curious assumption for a book on national traditions. How else is one to construe the sentence with which Krader concludes his contribution: “The promulgation of critique [. . .] will determine for us that we have exceeded the given state of man as we find him and will spur our theory beyond the mere reflection of the given state” (p. 32)?

In short, although many individual papers in the volume are highly interesting (e.g., those of Pouillon, Wolf, Hulkkranz, Josselin de Jong, Lepenies and others), the volume suffers from a failure to give due attention to historical context and the meaning of anthropological traditions within these contexts. Paradoxically, the perspective adopted generally removes the relevance of relativity in considering judgements of our ancestors, despite the fact that anthropology has preached the need for at least a degree of relativism in studying cultures. The curious absence of a sense that the judgements of many contributors may themselves be relative to a particular context and national/cultural tradition thus tends to lend a condescending tone towards ancestors who did not get things quite right and betrays the presentism which is anathema to good history, as naive as it is misleading. Rather, the history of anthropology should be seen as an anthropological problem, as Hallowell suggested. As such it attends to problems of context and meaning in specific historical settings (as, for example, Stocking has done), respects historic diversity and, in the spirit of Croce, functions as interpretations of the present concerns, interests and world view of its practitioners and all those who feel the discipline of significance in their lives.

Finally, the considerable number of errata in the book strengthen the impression that, despite the lag of more than twelve years between the Wenner-Gren symposium and the publication of this volume, the book was thrown together somewhat hastily.

Overall, an important book for those interested in the history of anthropology—as a stepping stone.

Benjamin Kilborne


Masset est le centre de peuplement le plus septentrional des Indiens Haida, à l’extrême nord des îles de la Reine Charlotte, l’autre se trouvant à Skidegate. L’auteur présente les résultats d’une enquête qui s’est étendue sur trente et un mois, principalement entre 1962 et 1965, avec des séjours plus brefs de 1967 à 1977. Son livre fait alterner détails concrets et tableaux statistiques. Il constitue une étude fouillée de la condition et de l’activité d’une communauté amérindienne, observée pendant un temps où l’on pouvait croire que tout ou presque des institutions et de la vie traditionnelles avait complètement disparu, et où rien ne laissait prévoir le renouveau dont la Colombie britannique a été le théâtre pendant la dernière décennie et qu’elle continue d’être depuis.

Ce n’est pas le moindre intérêt du livre, mais non le seul. L’ouvrage illustre en effet, de façon saisissante, une entreprise méthodique pour détruire physiquement et moralement, sans violence ostensible, une société indigène. Au cours du xixe siècle, les maladies importées ont réduit la population haida dans la proportion de 80 à 90 %; ce qui en